

Letter to the Editor

Response to Dr. Hook

To the Editor:

I appreciate Dr. Hook's letter regarding his personal experience in offering unsolicited clinical genetic advice to a friend. Because of the nature of our work, this experience is probably nearly universal among clinical geneticists, and I thank the editors of the *Journal* for providing us, through the "Genetic Drift" column, with a forum for discussing this and other such issues.

Since the unfortunate incident with my former friends, the Bennetts, I've come to agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Hook's conclusion that the best way to handle such situations is through some third party, preferable the individual's primary care provider. Had I simply phoned Rebecca Bennett's pediatrician in Seattle and expressed my concerns regarding the diagnosis of Bardet-Biedl syndrome, I'd probably still have a friendly relationship with my former roommate and his wife.

But the issue of what should be done when we make a diagnosis in an individual with whom we have no

relationship still requires some expert solution. Recently, while shopping at a local mall, I encountered a child with the classic appearance of Williams syndrome. What was I to do in this situation? To a geneticist, the diagnosis might appear obvious, but to the child's pediatrician, this relatively rare condition might be unknown. Because of the medical and behavioral implications of this disorder, should I have approached the child's father? Or should I have ignored the family completely? In this instance, I chose the latter option, but I've been wondering about it ever since.

I thank Dr. Hook for his kind suggestions and for sharing his experience. Unfortunately, however, it appears as if this puzzle is still unsolved.

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Received 7 June 1996; Accepted 7 June 1996